

# Blasts kill 3, injure 30 in Bangladesh



Bangladesh police and Army at the hideout

## Dhaka

At least three people were killed and 30 wounded yesterday in two explosions in Bangladesh's northeastern city of Sylhet where army commandos stormed an Islamist extremist hideout, police and hospital staff said.

Two "powerful" blasts went off some 400 yards (metres) from the hideout, targeting a huge crowd of people and police officials who were witnessing the commando operation, police said.

"At least three people including a policeman were killed," Sylhet police spokesman Zedan Al Musa said.

More than 30 people were wounded including several army, police and elite security officers, Sylhet Medical College Hospital medical officer Atiqul Islam said.

Police have not blamed any

group for the blasts, which occurred as commandos engaged in a day-long gunfight with suspected Islamist extremists holed up in a five-storey building.

The commandos backed by armoured personnel carriers launched the operation after a more than 30-hour standoff that began early Friday morning when police sealed off the place after suspected militants detonated small bombs.

Armed forces spokesman Colonel Rashidul Hasan said earlier that 78 people who were trapped in the building for more than a day were rescued by the commandos.

"The operation began in the morning and is still going on," he said, adding the commandos "exchanged fire" with the suspected militants who were confined in a ground-floor apartment

of the building.

The spokesman could not say how many extremists were in the building, but police said there were at least two including a woman.

Police used loudspeakers to ask the extremists to surrender, but they refused to give up, Musa said.

The raid came after a series of suicide attacks on security camps by extremists this month including one at a police checkpoint near the country's main international airport on Friday night.

Two of the attacks including Friday's blast in which the suicide attacker was killed were claimed by Islamic State group.

This month a police elite unit also stormed a building outside Chittagong, killing four members of Jamayetul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). (AFP)

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Do you think illegal car sales rackets are broadly functional in Bahrain?

Yes  No  Can't Say



Trump has got perfect genes. He has incredible energy and he's unbelievably healthy"

-Steven Mnuchin  
US Treasury Secretary

## Rest in sight

Tillerson to meet allies as NATO races to save talks



US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will meet with NATO members next week in Brussels, officials said Friday, as alliance diplomats worked to nail down the date.

Kasparov wants chess at African schools

Russia's former world chess champion Garry Kasparov wants to bring the game to a million children in Africa as an educational tool to sharpen their learning skills and build confidence.

Customs agents fraud ring busted in Guatemala

Guatemala busted a ring of at least 15 customs agents, port and transport company workers on Friday for using falsified documents to avoid customs duties.

At least 50 killed by armed men in CAfrica

At least 50 people have been killed and dozens more injured since Tuesday after armed men attacked three villages in the central Bambari region in Central Africa.

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## President's son was Cuba's secret negotiator: cardinal

### Havana

Cuban President Raul Castro's son, Alejandro, was the communist island's envoy for secret negotiations with the United States that led to the countries' historic rapprochement, a cardinal close to the talks said.

Speculation had long swirled that Alejandro Castro Espin, the president's 51-year-old son, headed up the secret talks.

But the confirmation from Cardinal Jaime Ortega, the former archbishop of Havana, is the most official

namedrop to date and further boosts the profile of Castro Espin, who is touted as a possible future president of Cuba.

Alejandro, was "at the head of the Cuban delegation," Ortega said in a speech to a conference in the US that was published in the latest issue of a Cuban Catholic magazine.

Ortega, who recently stepped down as head of the Cuban Church, represented the Vatican at the talks, which Pope Francis played a key part in brokering.

## Russia trying to gain influence in Libya: US

### Washington

Russia is trying to expand its influence in Libya through a combination of military means and oil and weapons sales, a top US general said Friday.

General Thomas Tom Waldhauser, who heads the US military's Africa Command, said Russia is "on the ground" in the border region between Egypt and Libya.

"They are trying to influence the action, we watch what they do with great concern," Waldhauser told Pentagon reporters.

"In addition to the military side of this, we've seen some recent activity in business ventures -- whether it's oil, whether it's weapon sales that perhaps were stopped when the (Moamer) Kadhafi



Lt Gen Thomas D. Waldhauser

regime took place."

A US official this month said that Moscow apparently has deployed military forces to a base in western Egypt.

The official said Russia appears to have sent special operations forces to an air base at Sid Barrani, which is located about 100 kilometers (60 miles) east of the Libyan border.

## US charges Lebanese 'Hezbollah financier'

### Washington

US authorities arrested a long-wanted alleged Hezbollah financier Friday on charges of violating US terror-related sanctions, after he was apparently deported to the United States from Morocco.

Kassim Tajideen was formally charged in US federal court in Washington nearly eight years after the United States named him a "specially designated global terrorist" for allegedly proving tens of millions of dollars to the Lebanese Shiite movement.

He was charged with multiple counts of violating US terrorism sanctions regulations as well as money

laundering.

According to multiple media reports, Tajideen was arrested on arrival in Casablanca on March 12 on a request by US authorities.

He arrived in the United States early Friday, but the Justice Department would not confirm that he had been handed over to the United States by Morocco.

A commodities trader across the Middle East and Africa, Tajideen was given the terror finance designation in May 2009, which carries sanctions that largely locked him out of global financial networks. The designation named him an "important financial contributor" to Hezbollah.

## Wild elephants rescued

### Phnom Penh

Eleven wild elephants, including a baby, were rescued from a mud-filled bomb crater in Cambodia yesterday after languishing in the swampy waters for four days, an environmental official said.

"They got in there to drink water and could not get out," Keo Sopheak, the head of the environmental office in eastern Mondulki province said.

He also said the three-meter-deep mud pit, created by a bomb during the country's civil war, was located in a protected forest area and had been enlarged by local villagers to store water.



Elephants in the mud crater (AFP)

The elephants were discovered in the crater on Friday, said Keo Sopheak, with only their rounded backs and heads poking out of the pool.

"We had to dig away the

edge of the crater by hand to make a path," the official said, adding that rescuers also pumped water into the crater to thin out the sludge and help the animals climb out.